

# Leo Strauss

## Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero* [The Last Paragraph]<sup>1</sup>

The utmost I can hope to have shown in taking issue with Kojève's thesis regarding the relation of tyranny and wisdom is that Xenophon's thesis regarding that grave subject is not only compatible with the idea of philosophy but required by it. This is very little. For the question arises immediately whether the idea of philosophy is not itself in need of legitimation. Philosophy in the strict and classical sense is quest for the eternal order or for the eternal cause or causes of all things. It presupposes then that there is an eternal and unchangeable order within which History takes place and which is not in any way affected by History. It presupposes, in other words, that any "realm of freedom" is not more than a dependent province within the "realm of necessity." It presupposes, in the words of Kojève, that "Being is essentially immutable in itself and eternally identical with itself." This presupposition is not self-evident. Kojève rejects it in favor of the view that "Being creates itself in the course of History," or that the highest being is Society and History, or that eternity is nothing but the totality of historical, i.e., finite time. On the basis of the classical presupposition, a radical distinction must be made between the conditions of understanding and the sources of understanding, between the conditions of the existence and perpetuation of philosophy (societies of a certain kind, and so on) and the sources of philosophic insight. On the basis of Kojève's presupposition, that distinction loses its crucial significance: social change or fate affects being, if it is not identical with Being, and hence affects truth. On the basis of Kojève's presuppositions, unqualified attachment to human concerns becomes the source of philosophic understanding: man must be absolutely at home on earth, he must be absolutely a citizen of the earth, if not a citizen of a part of the inhabitable earth. On the basis of the classical presupposition, philosophy requires a radical detachment

from human concerns: man must not be absolutely at home on earth, he must be a citizen of the whole. In our discussion, the conflict between the two opposed basic presuppositions has barely been mentioned. But we have always been mindful of it. For we both apparently turned away from Being to Tyranny because we have seen that those who lacked the courage to face the issue of Tyranny, who therefore *et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*,<sup>2</sup> were forced to evade the issue of Being as well, precisely because they did nothing but talk of Being.

### Notes

[The notes below to the last paragraph of the Restatement are entirely the work of the present editor. —Ed.]

1. This is the last paragraph of Strauss's "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*." The "Restatement" served as Strauss's response to the essay by Alexandre Kojève, "Tyranny and Wisdom," which was an explication in counterpoint to Strauss's own interpretation of the text of Xenophon's dialogue, *Hiero*. Hence, the "Restatement" concluded the high philosophic debate contained in *On Tyranny*. However, the famous last paragraph, which was present in the French version, *De la tyrannie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), was missing from the first complete English version of *On Tyranny* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1963). Fortunately, it has been added to the revised and augmented version of *On Tyranny*, edited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (New York: Free Press, 1991). Unfortunately, Gourevitch and Roth were forced to rely on their own English translation from the French version, which was itself a translation from Strauss's original English version! Thanks to Laurence Berns, who received a copy of the typescript of the original English version from Strauss, this is the first appearance in print of that famous last paragraph as it was actually written. I would suggest that this is the closest thing we possess to a metaphysical confession of faith by Strauss, and I would also further suggest that it points us to some important theological implications which would seem to follow directly from it. See, e.g., "On the Interpretation of Genesis," *supra*, 361.

2. Gourevitch and Roth, 212, translate the Latin phrase of Livy, *History of Rome* 24.25.8, in the following words: "themselves obsequiously subservient while arrogantly lording it over others." I believe that Strauss, in this use of the words of Livy, means to allude unambiguously to Martin Heidegger. For how Strauss viewed Heidegger, one must add (as supplementary to what he says explicitly in some of the essays of this book, in other immediately relevant essays, as well as in passing remarks of seemingly unrelated essays and books) the implicit critique that is contained in a brief reference: Strauss refers the reader to C. F. Meyer, *Die Versuchung des Pescara* (1887). (See note 23, p. 174

supra, which is a note to a passage on p. 150 supra, in the text of "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*." The novella by Meyer might be characterized as a literary treatment of the following theme: how a truly noble man deals with the temptation of the promise of immortal glory, with immortal glory to be achieved through committing a base act, and with the promise itself couched in the language of a religious Call. See Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, "Die Versuchung des Pescara," in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans Zeller and Alfred Zäch, vol. 13, pp. 151–275 (Bern: Benteli, 1962). See also, for an English translation, "The Temptation of Pescara," in *The Complete Narrative Prose of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer*, ed. and trans. George F. Folkers, David B. Dickens, and Marion W. Sonnenfeld, vol. 2, pp. 225–306 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1976).

## "Citizen of the Whole"

*Strauss - On Tyranny, last paragraph [omitted in english]*

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All I can hope to have proven by opposing Kojève's thesis on the relation between tyranny and wisdom is that Xenophon's thesis on this important topic is not only compatible with the idea of philosophy, but is even required by it. That is not a very great deal, for the question immediately arises whether the idea of philosophy itself does not require legitimation. Philosophy, in the strict, classical sense of the term, is the quest for the eternal order, or for the eternal cause or causes of all things. I assume, then, that there is an eternal and immutable order within which history takes place, and which remains entirely unaffected by history. In other words, I assume that any "realm of freedom" is but a province that depends on the "realm of necessity." In Kojève's terms, this presupposes that "Being is essentially immutable in itself and eternally identical with itself." This hypothesis is not self-evident; Kojève rejects it in favor of the idea that "Being creates itself in the course of history," or that the highest Being is society and history, or that eternity is nothing but the totality of historical time, that is to say finite. On the basis of the classical hypothesis, a radical distinction has to be drawn between the conditions of understanding and its sources, between the conditions for the existence and the pursuit of philosophy (specific kinds of societies, etc.) on the one hand, and the sources of philosophical knowledge on the other. On the basis of Kojève's hypothesis, that distinction is deprived of its most important meaning: social change or chance affect Being if, indeed, they are not identical with it, and they thus affect the truth. On the basis of Kojève's hypothesis, absolute attachment to human interests becomes the source of philosophical knowledge: man ought to feel absolutely at home on earth; he must absolutely be a citizen of the earth, if not a citizen of a particular part of the inhabitable earth. On the basis of the classical hypothesis, philosophy requires radical detachment from human interests: man ought not to feel absolutely at home on earth, but ought to be a citizen of the whole. In our discussion the conflict between the two opposing fundamental hypotheses has barely been mentioned. But we have been constantly mindful of it, for both of us appear to turn our attention away from Being and toward tyranny because we saw that those who lacked the courage to face the consequences of tyranny, who, therefore *et humiliter serviebant et superbe dominabantur*,\* were at the same time forced to escape the consequences of Being precisely because they did nothing but speak about Being.

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\* <themselves obsequiously subservient while arrogantly lording it over others. Livy XXIV, 25, viii >